

# MN 20

## Quiz

Answer the following questions based on the provided text. Each answer should be 2-3 sentences.

1. What does "vitakka" mean according to the Pali Text Society dictionary?
2. What are the five factors monks should focus on from time to time to remove distractions?
3. Explain the concept of "Anyā Nimitta" and how it helps remove distractions.
4. How can examining the "danger" or "disadvantage" of unwholesome thoughts help in overcoming them?
5. Explain the practice of "Amaṇa sikkhā" (non-attention/avoidance) and its application in walking meditation.
6. Describe "Vitakka Santāna" (thought reduction or mental analysis) and how it can be practiced.
7. When should the "last resort" technique of teeth clenching and tongue pressing be used?
8. How can one counter hatred towards living beings according to the sūta?
9. How can one counter ignorance or delusion according to the sūta?
10. Explain how the Parable of the Back Away Month relates to Vitakka Santana?

## Answer Key

1. According to the Pali Text Society dictionary, "vitakka" means reflection, thought, or thinking factors. It is also known as initial application.
2. The five factors are: Anyā Nimitta (different sign or wholesome thought displacement), examining the danger/disadvantage of unwholesome thoughts, Amaṇa sikkhā (disregarding/non-attention), Vitakka Santāna (thought reduction/mental analysis), and sustained effort involving teeth clenching and tongue pressing.
3. Anyā Nimitta involves turning attention away from unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, or delusion and turning towards a different sign connected with the wholesome. This practice helps replace negative thoughts with positive and constructive ones.
4. Examining the danger or disadvantage of unwholesome thoughts helps in overcoming them by making one aware of the suffering and negative consequences they can bring. Recognizing the harm they cause motivates one to get rid of them.
5. Amaṇa sikkhā is the practice of disregarding or not paying attention to distracting thoughts or sights. In walking meditation, this involves ignoring external stimuli like people or objects to maintain focus.
6. Vitakka Santāna involves thought reduction or mental analysis, focusing on stilling the thought. You can focus more on stealing the thoughts, focusing on it repeatedly.
7. The "last resort" technique of teeth clenching and tongue pressing should be used only when all other methods of dealing with distracting thoughts have failed. It is a strenuous effort to subdue and restrain the mind.
8. To counter hatred towards living beings, one should cultivate loving kindness, compassion, and equanimity. One should also reflect on ownership of karma and how anger affects us in the moment.

9. To counter ignorance or delusion, one should rely on five Dharma supports. These include guidance of a teacher, intent on learning the Dharma, inquiry into the meaning of doctrines, listening to Dharma at proper times, and inquiry into what are not the causes.
10. The Parable of the Back Aching Wheel relates to Vitakka Sutta in that the skillful carpenter knows how to remove the wheel with another smaller one. Similarly, when one has the unwholesome thoughts are replaced by wholesome thoughts.

### Essay Questions

1. Discuss the relevance of the Vitakka Saṅghāṇa Sutta's techniques for managing distractions in the context of modern digital life and information overload.
2. Compare and contrast the five factors outlined in the Vitakka Saṅghāṇa Sutta, analyzing their individual strengths and limitations as methods for overcoming negative thought patterns.
3. Evaluate the Vitakka Saṅghāṇa Sutta as a cognitive behavioral approach to treatment for psychological patients?
4. Explore the ethical implications of the "last resort" technique (teeth clenching and tongue pressing) described in the Vitakka Saṅghāṇa Sutta, considering its potential impact on mindfulness and emotional regulation.
5. Analyze the importance of loving kindness, compassion, and equanimity in combating hatred according to the Vitakka Saṅghāṇa Sutta.

Here's an FAQ based on the provided excerpt from Bhante Sumitta's talk on the Vitakka Saṅghāṇa Sutta (MN 20):

#### 1. What is the Vitakka Saṅghāṇa Sutta about and why is it relevant today?

The Vitakka Saṅghāṇa Sutta, as explained by Bhante Sumitta, deals with the removal of distracting thoughts. "Vitakka" refers to reflection, thought, or thinking factors, while "Saṅghāṇa" refers to configuration, position, composition, nature, shape, or form. The sutta provides practical techniques to achieve deep focus amidst distractions, highly relevant in today's world where many individuals struggle with scattered attention due to constant stimulation. The teachings are applicable to meditation practitioners, students, and anyone overwhelmed by distracting thoughts.

#### 2. What are the five factors (Pancha) mentioned in the sutta and how do they work?

The five factors are techniques to deal with distracting thoughts:

**By a different sign (Anyā Nimitta):** Replacing an unwholesome thought with a wholesome one. This involves turning attention away from thoughts connected with desire, hate, or delusion and focusing on thoughts connected with wholesome mental objects. For example, if lust arises, one can reflect on the 32 parts of the body or the impermanence of things.

**By examining its danger (Adinava):** Recognizing the disadvantages and dangers of unwholesome thoughts, understanding that they lead to suffering. By acknowledging the negative consequences of the distraction, one can create aversion and release it.

**By disregarding them (Amanasikara):** Ignoring and not paying attention to distracting thoughts. It requires training the mind to disregard unwanted sensory inputs and thoughts, similar to ignoring distractions during walking meditation.

**By stealing thought formations (Vitakka Saṅghāṇa):** Reducing or redirecting the intensity of the thought. A good example of this is the story of Angulimāla, where the Buddha has already stopped, but Angulimāla is still running. If you're walking too fast, slow down. If you're walking slow, stop. If you're standing, sit down. If you are sitting, lie down.

**By teeth clenching and tongue pressing (Last Resort):** As a last resort, applying physical pressure by clenching the teeth and pressing the tongue against the palate to subdue and

restrain the unwholesome mind with a wholesome mind. This is a strenuous effort used when other methods fail.

### **3. How can the "different sign" (Anyā Nimitta) factor be applied when dealing with specific unwholesome thoughts like desire, hatred, and delusion?**

The "different sign" factor involves countering unwholesome thoughts with specific antidotes:

**Desire:** Reflect on the unattractiveness of the body (32 parts) or the impermanence of things.

**Hatred:** Cultivate loving-kindness, compassion, and equanimity (Brahma Viharas), and reflect on the ownership of karma.

**Delusion:** Seek guidance from a teacher, intend to learn the Dhamma, inquire into the meaning of doctrines, listen to Dhamma talks, and investigate the causes of what is and what is not.

### **4. What does it mean to examine the danger (Adinava) of unwholesome thoughts, and how does this help in removing them?**

Examining the danger involves recognizing the negative consequences of unwholesome thoughts. This includes acknowledging that such thoughts are unwholesome, savage, and lead to suffering for oneself and others. Reflecting on these dangers creates a sense of shame and fear of bad karma, motivating one to abandon the thoughts.

### **5. How does the practice of "disregarding" or "non-attention" (Amanasikara) work, especially in the context of meditation and daily life?**

The practice of disregarding involves consciously choosing not to engage with distracting thoughts or sensory inputs. In walking meditation, this means ignoring sights or sounds that arise. In daily life, it means actively diverting attention away from distractions, similar to closing one's eyes or looking away from something unwanted.

### **6. What does the "stealing of thought formations" (Vitakka Saṅṭhāṇa) entail, and how does the parable of the walking monk illustrate this?**

"Stealing of thought formations" involves gradually reducing the intensity of thoughts and finding a less stimulating state. The parable of the walking monk illustrates this by showing how one can transition from walking fast to walking slowly, then to standing, sitting, and finally lying down, reducing discomfort and mental agitation at each step. This technique can be used for anything from the discomfort of moving to the discomfort of a negative thought or feeling.

### **7. When and how should the "teeth clenching and tongue pressing" technique (Last Resort) be used?**

The "teeth clenching and tongue pressing" technique should be used as a last resort when all other methods have failed to subdue unwholesome thoughts. It involves a strong physical effort to create a determined mental state, pushing away the distracting thoughts. This method demonstrates a firm commitment to avoiding unwholesome thoughts, even when they are persistent.

### **8. The transcript mentions "Karma." How is that related to the practice of Vitakka Saṅṭhāṇa?**

The transcript discusses reflecting on the ownership of Karma as a means to combat hatred and ill-will, and as a way of counteracting the negative consequences of unwholesome thoughts and actions. When hatred arises, remembering that you are the owner of your karma and will experience the results of your actions can deter you from acting on those hateful thoughts and promote wholesome actions instead.

# MN21

## II. Quiz - Short Answer Questions

- What is the main point of the simile of the saw in the Kakacūpama Sutta?
- What was the nature of Mia pagun's association with the bikun that caused concern?
- According to the Sutta, how should one train themselves to respond to criticism or blame?
- Explain the significance of the story of Lady Vedika and Kali in the context of the Sutta's teachings.
- What are the five ways that speech might arise, according to the Sutta?
- What does the sutta suggest about the relationship between outward behavior and inner qualities?
- What is the significance of dispelling and moving away from unskillful action?
- According to the Sutta, what defines someone who is easy to instruct?
- Why is it essential to understand a person's motivations before making judgments?
- How does the Sutta challenge individuals to use the DH in the face of adversity?

## III. Quiz - Answer Key

- The simile illustrates the importance of maintaining equanimity and loving-kindness even when facing extreme violence, emphasizing that one should not harbor anger or ill-will towards the perpetrators.
- Mia pagun spent excessive time with bikun, becoming visibly upset and overly protective when they were criticized, which was considered inappropriate.
- One should train oneself to remain calm, not react with anger or unseemly behavior, and instead respond with compassion and loving-kindness.
- The story highlights that true gentleness and kindness are revealed in how one reacts to difficult situations and that outward appearances can be deceiving.
- Speech can be delivered at the right or wrong time, be true or false, be kind or mean, be intended to benefit or harm, and be driven by loving-kindness or anger and hate.
- Outward behavior might not always reflect one's true inner qualities. Only under pressure can one's kindness, gentleness, and calmness be truly tested.
- Skillful action leads to growth in practice and development in DH training, while unskillful actions hinder one's progress.
- Someone who is easy to instruct respects, reveres, and worshipfully venerates the DH.
- Understanding a person's motivations can provide insight into their actions and help one respond with compassion and understanding rather than judgment and anger.
- The Sutta challenges individuals to remain open-hearted and compassionate, seeing life as an opportunity to use wisdom, practice non-agitation, and cultivate Meta.

## IV. Essay Questions

- Discuss the role of "wise attention" (radical attention) in cultivating tranquility and forgiveness as taught in the Kakacūpama Sutta. How can individuals apply these principles in their daily lives to better manage conflict and adversity?
- Explore the significance of the simile of the saw within the broader context of Buddhist ethics and practice. How does this image challenge traditional notions of justice and retribution, and what does it reveal about the nature of suffering and liberation?

Analyze the story of Lady Vedika and Kali as a parable for the challenges of monastic and lay life. What lessons can be drawn from this narrative about the importance of authenticity, self-awareness, and ethical conduct?

Discuss the ways the Sutta encourages practitioners to remain grounded in virtue while facing criticism or mistreatment from others. How can one effectively use these teachings to protect oneself and remain open-hearted to others?

The Sutta offers multiple similes from every-day life. Discuss three of the similes and explain how they contribute to the sutta's main teachings.

#### FAQ on Kakacūpama Sutta (The Simile of the Saw)

##### 1. What is the central theme of the Kakacūpama Sutta (MN 21)?

The Kakacūpama Sutta emphasizes the importance of maintaining mental tranquility, forgiveness, endurance, tolerance, kindness, and loving-kindness in the face of adversity and criticism. It teaches practitioners to cultivate a mind that is not shaken by unpleasant experiences or harmful speech from others, embodying these virtues even in extreme circumstances.

##### 2. What was the situation involving Venerable Moliya Phagguna that prompted this discourse?

Venerable Moliya Phagguna was spending excessive time associating with bikkhunis (nuns). He would become visibly upset and defensive if anyone criticized or blamed the nuns in his presence, or if anyone criticized him in the nuns' presence, creating an inappropriate dynamic within the monastic community.

##### 3. What advice does the Buddha give Moliya Phagguna regarding his reactions to criticism of the bikkhunis?

The Buddha advises Moliya Phagguna to relinquish reactions and behaviors more appropriate for laypeople. Instead, he should train himself so that his heart remains unshaken and unagitated, and that he does not speak or act unskillfully. He should maintain a heart full of compassion and loving-kindness, without any hateful or angry thoughts, even if the bikkhunis are being physically harmed.

##### 4. Why does the Buddha tell the story of the householder's wife, Vedika, and her slave girl, Kali?

The story of Vedika and Kali illustrates that true gentleness, kindness, and calmness are revealed during challenging situations. A person may appear virtuous when things are going well, but their true character emerges when they are confronted, tested, or treated unfairly. The Buddha uses this to highlight the importance of developing genuine inner qualities rather than merely presenting a favorable facade.

##### 5. According to the Buddha, what distinguishes a genuinely humble and easy-to-admonish bhikkhu from one who is merely pretending?

A genuinely humble bhikkhu reveres the Dhamma and dedicates their life to living and behaving according to its teachings. They are easy to instruct and admonish because they cannot be otherwise due to their deep respect for the Dhamma. In contrast, a bhikkhu who pretends to be humble for the sake of receiving support is a fraud.

##### 6. How does the Buddha address the various ways in which people may speak to or about us?

The Buddha points out that people's speech can vary in five ways: being timely or untimely, true or false, kind or unkind, beneficial or harmful, and driven by loving-kindness or anger/hate. Regardless of these

factors, the key is to train oneself so that one's heart remains unshaken, unagitated, and filled with loving-kindness towards the speaker.

7. What are some of the similes the Buddha uses to illustrate the futility of reacting with anger or aversion?

The Buddha uses several similes:

A man trying to empty the earth with a shovel and wheelbarrow.

A man trying to paint pictures in the air.

A man trying to burn away the river Ganges with a grass torch.

A man trying to roughen a smoothed and polished cat skin leather bag.

The Simile of the Saw

These similes demonstrate the impossibility and self-defeating nature of trying to control or change external circumstances through anger or aversion.

8. What is the significance of the Simile of the Saw, and what challenge does the Buddha present?

The Simile of the Saw is the most striking. It states that even if thugs were to cut a bhikkhu (or anyone) in half with a two-handed saw, the individual should not allow their heart to be overcome by evil thoughts or defilements against the attackers. To do so would be to fail in practicing the Buddha's teachings. This emphasizes the extreme level of mental fortitude and loving-kindness that practitioners are encouraged to cultivate, even in the face of unimaginable suffering.

## MN22

### II. Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to the Alagaddupama Sutta, why is it important not to engage with obstructions or hindrances in meditation?
2. Describe the dangers inherent in sensual pleasures as highlighted in the text.
3. Explain the central message of the simile of the snake in relation to the Dhamma.
4. What does the simile of the raft illustrate about the purpose and use of the Dhamma?
5. Why is it important to abandon attachment to good or serene states, according to the Sutta?
6. What are the six standpoints for views, and how do they relate to the concept of "self"?
7. Explain how clinging to views about the self can lead to agitation, according to the text.
8. Describe the relationship between impermanence (anicca) and suffering as explained in the Sutta.
9. What does it mean to say that material form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are "not yours"?
10. How does one become "disenchanted" with these 5 things in order to become dispassionate?

### III. Answer Key

1. Engaging with obstructions or hindrances feeds them and allows them to grow, leading to suffering and preventing progress on the path to liberation.



2. Sensual pleasures offer only fleeting gratification while carrying inherent dangers, much suffering, and despair.
3. The simile of the snake emphasizes that wrongly grasping or misinterpreting the Dhamma can be as dangerous as improperly handling a snake, leading to harm and suffering.
4. The simile of the raft illustrates that the Dhamma is a tool for crossing over to liberation, but it should not be clung to or grasped once the goal is reached, as attachment to the teachings themselves can become an obstacle.
5. Attachment to even positive or serene states can become a form of clinging that prevents complete liberation, thus it is more important to cultivate equanimity and detachment from all experiences.
6. The six standpoints for views involve regarding material form, feeling, perception, formations, what is seen/heard/sensed/cognized, and the self as "mine," "I am," and "myself," which reinforces the concept of a permanent and enduring self.
7. Clinging to views about the self, especially the belief in a permanent and unchanging self, can lead to agitation when faced with teachings about impermanence and the elimination of standpoints, as it threatens the perceived existence of the self.
8. The Sutta explains that because all phenomena are impermanent (anicca), they are also subject to suffering (dukkha), as anything impermanent cannot provide lasting satisfaction or security.
9. Saying that material form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness are "not yours" means that they are not inherently part of a self or under one's control, and recognizing this can lead to detachment and liberation.
10. One becomes disenchanted by seeing these things with proper wisdom, which leads to dispassion, liberation, the knowledge that birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, and there is no more coming to any state of being.

#### IV. Essay Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the simile of the snake and the raft in understanding the correct approach to learning and practicing the Dhamma.
2. Analyze the role of abandonment in the Alagaddupama Sutta, focusing on the importance of abandoning not only negative states but also attachment to positive ones.
3. Explore the concept of "not-self" (anatta) as presented in the Sutta and explain how understanding this concept can lead to liberation from suffering.
4. Discuss the relationship between the five aggregates (material form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness) and the path to liberation as described in the Alagaddupama Sutta.
5. Examine the ethical implications of accurately understanding and representing the Buddha's teachings, as highlighted in the section on the misrepresentation of the Tathagata.

#### FAQ

1. **What is the main point of the Alagaddupama Sutta (Simile of the Snake)?**  
The Sutta emphasizes the importance of rightly grasping the Dhamma (teachings). Like a person who grabs a snake by the tail and suffers harm, a misguided person who learns the Dhamma but doesn't examine its meaning with wisdom, or who uses it only to criticize others, will experience harm and suffering. Conversely, one who understands and practices the Dhamma correctly, like a person who properly catches a snake, will benefit from it and experience welfare and happiness. It also teaches us not to cling even to good states like serenity and insight, but to maintain a balanced perspective.

2. **What does the simile of the raft illustrate?**

The simile of the raft illustrates that the Dhamma is a tool for crossing over to liberation, not something to be grasped or clung to once that goal is reached. Just as a person who has used a raft to cross a river shouldn't carry it around unnecessarily, we should abandon even the teachings once we've used them to reach the other shore (Nibbana/Nirvana). This highlights the impermanent nature of even the most valuable tools and the importance of letting go of attachment.

3. **What is the "pernicious view" held by the bhikkhu Arata, and why is it considered wrong?**

The bhikkhu Arata held the view that "those things called obstructions by the Blessed One are not able to obstruct one who engages in them." This is a dangerous misinterpretation of the Dhamma because it suggests that one can indulge in sensual pleasures without suffering the consequences. The Buddha refutes this view, explaining that sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and despair.

4. **What does the Buddha teach about sensual pleasures in this Sutta?**

The Buddha teaches that sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and despair. He uses several similes (skeleton, piece of meat, grass torch, pit of coals, dream, borrowed goods, fruits on a tree, butcher's knife and block, sword stake, and snake's head) to illustrate the dangers and unsatisfactoriness of pursuing sensual desires. He emphasizes that engaging in sensual pleasures leads to harm and suffering in the long run.

5. **What are the six "standpoints for views" that the Sutta discusses?**

The six standpoints are:

Regarding material form as "This is mine, this I am, this is myself."

Regarding feeling as "This is mine, this I am, this is myself."

Regarding perception as "This is mine, this I am, this is myself."

Regarding formations (thoughts) as "This is mine, this I am, this is myself."

Regarding what is seen, heard, sensed, cognized, etc., as "This is mine, this I am, this is myself."

The view that the self is the world and will be permanent, everlasting, and eternal after death. The Sutta contrasts these with the view of a well-taught noble disciple, who regards all these things as "not mine, this I am not, this is not myself," understanding their impermanent and impersonal nature.

6. **What does the Sutta teach about agitation (sorrow, grief, lamentation, etc.)?**

The Sutta distinguishes between agitation about what is non-existent externally and internally. Agitation about what is non-existent externally arises from thinking "Alas, I had it; alas, I have it no longer; alas, may I have it; alas, I do not get it." Agitation about what is non-existent internally arises from clinging to the view that there is a permanent self and fearing annihilation when hearing teachings on the elimination of standpoints. The solution is to let go of these views and attachments.

7. **What are the implications of seeing things as "not mine, this I am not, this is not myself"?**

Seeing things as "not mine, this I am not, this is not myself" leads to disenchantment with material form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. This disenchantment leads to dispassion, and through dispassion, the mind is liberated. When the mind is liberated, one understands that birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, and there is no more coming to any state of being.



8. **What is meant by the phrase, "the Dhamma well proclaimed by me thus is clear... and free of patchwork"?**

This phrase emphasizes that the Buddha's teachings are consistent, coherent, and easily understood when properly grasped. They are not a jumbled collection of ideas but a clear and direct path to liberation. This implies the importance of studying the Dhamma with wisdom and seeking clarification from qualified teachers when needed. It further implies that when people are not clear about the Dhamma it is because they are holding some view that prevents them from understanding it.

## MN23

### Vammika Sutta Study Guide

#### Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

- 1.
2. What was the determination made by the seven bhikkhus before they isolated themselves on a boulder?
3. What were the circumstances of the bhikkhuni's pregnancy and how did she come to be expelled and then re-accepted?
4. Explain the significance of King Pasenadi taking responsibility for raising the child Kumarakassapa.
5. In the Vammika Sutta, who is speaking when the text begins with "I have personally heard this..."? Where does the sutta say that this person is recollecting it?
6. In the Vammika Sutta, what is the significance of the ant hill fuming at night and blazing during the day?
7. According to the Vammika Sutta, who is the "brahmana" in the riddle and what role does he play?
8. What does the "sharp tool" represent and how is it used?
9. In the Vammika Sutta, what do the toad that swells up when touched, the forked path, and the water strainer each represent?
10. Explain the connection between the "cleaver with a chopping board" and the "piece of flesh."
11. In the Vammika Sutta, what is the final object encountered in the ant hill, and what is its significance?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The seven bhikkhus determined to go into seclusion to preserve the Dhamma due to its increasing corruption and declining practice.
2. The bhikkhuni became pregnant before being ordained; she was expelled by Devadatta but, after investigation by Upali and Visakha, it was proven that she became pregnant prior to ordination so she was readmitted.
3. King Pasenadi took responsibility for raising Kumarakassapa because the bhikkhuni, his mother, was unable to raise him due to her monastic life.
4. Venerable Ananda is speaking; he is recollecting it during the first council held in Rajagaha, about three months after the Buddha's death, where 500 arahants gathered to codify the suttas.
5. Fuming at night represents thoughts pondered upon during the night, while blazing during the day refers to actions taken based on those thoughts, through body, speech, and mind.

6. The "brahmana" represents the Tathagata, the arahant, the perfectly self-awakened one. His role is to encourage the "wise one" to continue digging.
7. The "sharp tool" represents noble wisdom; it is used to pierce through attachments, concepts, and expectations.
8. The toad that swells up when touched represents anger and confusion. The forked path represents having doubts in the heart. The water strainer represents the five hindrances.
9. Both represent sensual stimulation: the "cleaver with a chopping board" represents the five aspects of sensual stimulation and the "piece of flesh" represents obsession and lust for those sensations.
10. The final object is the Naga, which represents the bhikkhu with contaminants destroyed, the arahant. It is to be venerated and left in peace.

### Essay Questions

1. Discuss the role of compassion in the Vammika Sutta, particularly as it relates to the Anagami Deva's actions and the eventual enlightenment of Kumarakassapa's mother.
2. Analyze the Vammika Sutta as an allegory for the process of meditation and spiritual practice.
3. Compare and contrast the obstacles presented in the Vammika Sutta with the five hindrances as described in other suttas.
4. Explore the significance of the body in the Vammika Sutta, and how the sutta encourages detachment from bodily infatuation.
5. Discuss the importance of both intellectual understanding and practical application in the Vammika Sutta, referencing the roles of the "wise one" and the "sharp tool."

### **### What is the significance of the seven bikus who secluded themselves during the time of Kassapa Buddha?**

These seven bikus, recognizing the decline in Dhamma practice, made a pact to dedicate themselves to seclusion and intensive practice. While only two attained enlightenment in that lifetime, the others maintained their determination, died in deva realms, and eventually were reborn during Gautama Buddha's time, highlighting the importance of perseverance and the gradual accumulation of "paramis" or perfections over multiple lifetimes.

### **### How did Kumarakassapa come to be a bhikkhu?**

Kumarakassapa's mother, a bhikkhuni, became pregnant before her ordination with Devadatta's group. Buddha had Upali investigate and was found to have become pregnant before ordination, so was readmitted not in Devadatta's group. King Pasenadi raised the child and later, at the age of seven, the king sent him to Lord Buddha to be ordained as a bhikkhu.

### **### Who was the deva that appeared to Kumarakassapa, and what was his purpose?**

The deva was a former companion of Kumarakassapa from the time of Kassapa Buddha. Now reborn in a pure abode (anagami), the deva's compassion motivated him to help his former companions on the path to enlightenment. He presented Kumarakassapa with a series of riddles to encourage him to seek deeper understanding from the Buddha.

### **### What does the "ant hill" or "termite mound" symbolize in the Vammika Sutta?**

The ant hill is a simile for the human body. Just as an ant hill has many holes and is subject to decay, so too is the human body made up of elements, full of orifices, and prone to impermanence, aging, and eventual destruction. It "fumes at night" representing thoughts and ponderings during

nighttime and "blazes in the day" referring to the actions, words, and thoughts that arise from those night time ponderings.

**### According to the Sutta, who are the "brahmana" and the "wise one" and what do they represent?**

In this context, the "brahmana" is a simile for the Tathagata (the Buddha), the fully awakened one. The "wise one" refers to the disciple in higher training, the well-educated pupil, possessing the ability to persevere and trust the teacher's instructions.

**### What do the "sharp tool" and "digging" represent in the Vammika Sutta, and why are they essential?**

The "sharp tool" symbolizes noble wisdom, the knowledge that pierces through clinging, concepts, and expectations. "Digging" represents the constant, mindful effort applied to understanding and overcoming obstacles on the path to enlightenment. Relentless effort, without a break, non-stop application of mindful energy despite obstructions.

**### What are some of the obstacles encountered during "digging," and what do they symbolize in the Vammika Sutta?**

Several obstacles are encountered, each representing a hindrance to spiritual progress:

- \* \*\*The door bolt:\*\* Represents ignorance.
- \* \*\*The toad that swells up when touched:\*\* Represents anger and confusion.
- \* \*\*The forked path:\*\* Represents doubts in the heart.
- \* \*\*The water strainer:\*\* Represents the five hindrances (sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and skeptical doubt).
- \* \*\*The tortoise:\*\* Represents the five grasping aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness).
- \* \*\*The cleaver with the chopping board:\*\* Represents the five aspects of sensual stimulation.
- \* \*\*A piece of flesh:\*\* Represents obsession and lust.

**### What does the "naga" represent, and what is the significance of being told to "leave the naga in peace, do not harm the naga, venerate the naga"?**

The "naga" is a synonym for the bhikkhu with contaminants destroyed, the Arahant. This instruction highlights the reverence and respect due to those who have attained enlightenment, recognizing that they have become the embodiment of the Triple Gem. Do not disturb, or harm, but revere and worship the Naga.

## MN 24 Rathavinita Sutta: A Study Guide

### I. Quiz

1. Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.
2. Why does the speaker of this sutta feel it is essential to approach the suttas with reverence and respect?
3. According to the sutta, why did the Buddha repeat certain segments of his teachings?
4. What question did the Buddha ask the bhikkhus who came from Kapilavatthu, his native land?
5. What did Kondanya realize that made him go into the Himalayas to prepare himself?
6. Why did the speaker mention that Punna Mantani had gathered 500 bhikkhus around him, who he then taught?
7. In what way does the speaker describe the journey of the traveling bhikkhus in rural India during the Buddha's time?
8. What does it signify when a person circumambulates a teacher or a sacred object, keeping them on their right?
9. What is the significance of Sariputta testing Punna Mantani with a series of questions about the holy life?
10. Why does Punna Mantani argue that purification of virtue or mind cannot be the final goal of the holy life?
11. Explain the simile of King Pasenadi and the relay chariots.

### II. Quiz Answer Key

1. Approaching the suttas with reverence and respect is essential because they deserve to be treated as something that might bring us enlightenment if approached with the right intention. One should empty the mind like a receptacle for something new and be pure in approach and intentions.
2. The Buddha repeated segments of his teachings, sometimes extensively, to emphasize key points and ensure they were well understood and remembered. The speaker claims this is important because these repetitions will help the person to really develop in their understanding instead of going over it just on a superficial level.
3. The Buddha inquired about who was esteemed in his native land, Kapilavatthu, for their virtue, contentment, seclusion, energy, collectedness of mind, wisdom, deliverance, and knowledge of deliverance. He wanted to know who was the foremost in the Dhamma among the bhikkhus there.
4. Kondanya realized that with the birth of Siddhartha, there was an opportunity to have a Buddha among them, which doesn't happen often, and he wanted to prepare himself to become a student of the Buddha. He also knew he must prepare himself to be on the path to be a student of the Buddha.

5. Punna Mantani taught the bhikkhus the ten forms of proper speech from the Anguttara Nikaya, with which they all became arahants. The speaker includes this to point out Punna Mantani's influence and ability to teach the Dhamma effectively.
6. The journey was arduous, with bhikkhus facing challenges such as the lack of proper roads, the need to find food, and the uncertainty of the Buddha's location. Despite the difficulties, the speaker claims it was a worthwhile effort to be exposed to the Dhamma and reinvigorated.
7. Keeping a teacher or sacred object on one's right is a sign of respect because it avoids walking with one's back to the teacher. This tradition of circumambulation continues to this day at sacred sites like stupas and pagodas.
8. Sariputta was the chief disciple, so he tests Punna Mantani to ensure he has a correct understanding of the Dhamma and to see for himself what his position is on the other teachers and teachings contemporary teachers that were there who were also promoting different sorts of holy life in a sense different paths of living the holy life which did not have right view
9. Punna Mantani argues that purification of virtue or mind cannot be the final goal because they are still accompanied by clinging and are not nibbana itself. Also, he contends that if any one of them was the only thing you needed, than even an ordinary person could attain enlightenment.
10. The simile illustrates that purification of virtue leads to purification of mind, which leads to purification of view, and so on. This is similar to how King Pasenadi used relay chariots to reach his destination, switching chariots as each one reached its limit, one leading to the next.

### III. Essay Questions

1. Discuss the importance of reverence and respect in the study and practice of the Dhamma, drawing examples from the Rathavinita Sutta.
2. Analyze the seven purifications as presented in the Rathavinita Sutta, explaining how they relate to the ultimate goal of Nibbana without clinging.
3. Explain the significance of the encounter between Sariputta and Punna Mantani in the Rathavinita Sutta. What does this meeting reveal about the nature of Dhamma practice and verification?
4. Compare and contrast the roles of knowledge and vision in the context of the seven purifications.
5. Examine the mnemonic and storytelling aspects of the suttas in the context of the transmission of the Dharma

**What is the main point of the Rathavinita Sutta (Relay Chariots)?**

The Rathavināṭa Sutta, or Relay Chariots Sutta, uses the metaphor of a king traveling via a series of relay chariots to illustrate the progressive stages of purification a practitioner undergoes on the path to final Nibbana (liberation). Each chariot represents a specific stage of purification (virtue, mind, view, overcoming doubt, knowledge of the path, knowledge of the way, knowledge and vision) and is necessary to reach the next, ultimately leading to Nibbana. None of these stages, taken by themselves, represents the final goal, but rather contribute to the overall process of liberation without clinging.

### **Why is it important to approach the study of the Suttas with reverence?**

The Suttas are not meant to be read like ordinary texts such as newspapers or novels. To gain the most from them, one should approach them with a mind as empty as possible of preconceived notions and expectations. The Suttas deserve reverence because they can facilitate the experience of Nibbana. While the words themselves are not Nibbana, the combination of factors, including a pure intention, reverence, and respect for the teachings, can create the conditions for profound insight.

### **What does it mean to "empty out" the mind before studying the Suttas?**

Emptying out the mind means approaching the Suttas without preconceived expectations of what they should do for you. It involves setting aside any biases, assumptions, or fixed ideas that may color your interpretation of the teachings. Similar to using a clean container to receive something new, a clear mind allows the teachings to be received and understood without distortion.

### **Why does the Buddha use repetition in the Suttas?**

The Buddha repeats himself and uses narrative to get to the core of the meaning. The repetitions are there not to be tedious but to help to make you realize the meaning.

### **What are the seven purifications mentioned in the Sutta, and how do they relate to each other?**

The seven purifications are: purification of virtue (sīla), purification of mind (citta), purification of view (ditthi), purification by overcoming doubt (kankha-vitarana), purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path (maggamagga-ñāna-dassana), purification by knowledge and vision of the way (paṭipada-ñāna-dassana), and purification by knowledge and vision (ñāna-dassana). They represent a step-by-step guide for a meditator. Each purification builds upon the previous one, like relay chariots, enabling the practitioner to advance toward final Nibbana. The earlier purifications are necessary to prepare the ground for the later ones.

### **Why does Punna Mantaniputta answer "no" when Sariputta asks if each purification is the purpose of the holy life?**

Punna Mantaniputta answers "no" because each individual purification is not the ultimate goal in itself. He makes it clear that the holy life is lived for the sake of final Nibbana without clinging (anupada). He emphasizes that final Nibbana without clinging is the ultimate purpose of practicing.

### **How does the simile of the relay chariots illustrate the path to liberation?**



The simile shows that just as the king needs to use each chariot in the relay to reach his destination, a practitioner needs to go through each stage of purification to reach Nibbana. None of the individual chariots (or purifications) is the final destination, but each is essential for making progress toward it. The stages of purification can't be skipped. Each chariot stage is part of the overall process.

### **What role does personal practice play in understanding the Suttas?**

The Suttas need to be translated and understood based on personal practice. These were human beings meeting together and teachings were imparted to break free from dukkha. It has to be applied in the person's life. The teachings were never for theoretical undertaking.

## MN25

### Quiz

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What are the five *kāmaguṇa*?
2. According to the *Nivāpa Sutta*, what is Mara's intention when laying down bait?
3. How did the second herd of deer attempt to escape the deer trapper, and why did they ultimately fail?
4. What specific views ensnared the third group of recluses and brahmins, causing their failure to escape Mara's power?
5. How does one escape Mara's grasp according to the fourth group of practitioners in the *sutta*?
6. What are the four types of Mara according to the commentaries?
7. What are some of Mara's armies or helpers, as listed in the *Nivāpa Sutta*?
8. What is the significance of *jhānas* in overcoming Mara?
9. Why, according to the *sutta*, are the sensual pleasures of the world considered "Mara's bait"?
10. How does Right View contribute to liberation from Mara?

### Quiz Answer Key

1. The five *kāmaguṇa* are beautiful sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations that are agreeable, likable, and provocative of lust. They represent the sensual pleasures that entice beings and lead to attachment.
2. Mara's intention is not to provide the deer herd with enjoyment or longevity but to lure them into a state of heedlessness and intoxication, making them vulnerable to his control. He lays down bait so that when the practitioners are negligent, he can do with them as he likes.
3. The second herd of deer attempted to escape by retreating into the forest wilds, shunning the bait. However, they failed because, during the hot season, the lack of food and water weakened them, forcing them to return to the bait and fall into Mara's trap.
4. The third group of recluses and brahmins were ensnared by speculative views, such as whether the world is eternal or not, finite or infinite, whether the soul and body are the same or different, and questions about the existence of the *Tathāgata* after death. These views caused entanglement, argument, and a lack of true liberation.

5. According to the fourth group of practitioners, one escapes Mara's grasp by making one's dwelling place where Mara and his following cannot go. This refers to attaining meditative states (*jhānas*) and higher attainments, which provide a form of pleasure and detachment that transcends Mara's control.
6. The four types of Mara according to the commentaries are *Kilesa Mara* (Mara as the defilements), *Maccu Mara* (Mara as death), *Khandha Mara* (Mara as the five aggregates), and *Devaputta Mara* (Mara as a deva residing in the sensual heavens). Each represents different facets of suffering and obstruction on the path to liberation.
7. Some of Mara's armies or helpers include sensual pleasure, discontent, hunger and thirst, craving, sloth and torpor, fear, doubt, hypocrisy and obstinacy, reputation and gains, and self-exaltation. These are the internal and external factors that hinder spiritual progress.
8. *Jhānas* are significant because they represent meditative states where one experiences a bliss and detachment that surpasses sensual pleasures. By entering these states, practitioners go beyond Mara's reach, effectively "blinding" him by depriving him of his opportunity to influence them.
9. The sensual pleasures of the world are considered "Mara's bait" because they entice beings, leading to attachment, intoxication, and negligence. They keep beings bound to the cycle of suffering and under Mara's control, preventing them from attaining true liberation.
10. Right View contributes to liberation from Mara by providing clarity and understanding of the nature of reality, as taught in the Buddha's original Dharma. It helps practitioners avoid entanglement in speculative views and directs them toward the path of wisdom and freedom from Mara's influence.

#### Essay Questions

1. Discuss the symbolism of the four deer herds in the *Nivāpa Sutta*. How does each herd represent a different approach to spiritual practice, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach?
2. Explain the different facets of Mara as presented in the *Nivāpa Sutta* and its commentaries. How does understanding these different aspects of Mara contribute to a more profound understanding of the challenges and obstacles in Buddhist practice?
3. Analyze the role of sensuality and asceticism in the *Nivāpa Sutta*. Why does the *sutta* suggest that neither extreme sensuality nor extreme asceticism leads to liberation, and what middle path does it propose?
4. Discuss the significance of views in Buddhist practice, according to the *Nivāpa Sutta*. How do speculative and attachment to views hinder spiritual progress, and how can one cultivate Right View to overcome this obstacle?
5. Explore the relationship between meditative attainment (*jhāna*) and liberation from Mara in the *Nivāpa Sutta*. Why are *jhānas* considered a refuge from Mara, and how do they contribute to the ultimate goal of Nibbana?

#### FAQ on the Nivapa Sutta (MN 25)

1. **What is the central analogy in the Nivapa Sutta (MN 25)?**  
The sutta uses the analogy of four herds of deer and a deer trapper (representing Mara) to illustrate different ways practitioners engage with the world and sensuality, and how successful they are in escaping Mara's influence. The deer herds represent different types of practitioners, while the deer trapper symbolizes Mara, the personification of death, evil, temptation, and control over sensuality.
2. **Who does the "deer trapper" represent in the Nivapa Sutta, and what is his goal?**

The deer trapper in the Nivapa Sutta represents Mara, often described as the personification of death, evil, or temptation. Mara's goal is to trap the deer (practitioners) using bait (sensual pleasures) so that he can have power and control over them. The deer trapper doesn't want the deer to be long-lived and handsome. He wants to trap them, make them negligent, and then do with them as he likes.

3. **What are the "five cords of sensual pleasure" and how do they relate to the "bait"?**

The "bait" laid out by the deer trapper represents the five cords of sensual pleasure (kāmaguṇa), which are agreeable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. These are the things that entice beings and keep them bound to the cycle of suffering.

4. **What are the characteristics of the first herd of deer (the "partakers") and what is their downfall?**

The first herd, the "partakers," represents practitioners who indulge in sensual pleasures without restraint. They greedily eat the bait without caution, become intoxicated and negligent, and are easily caught by the deer trapper (Mara). They fail to get free from Mara's power because of their heedless consumption of sensual pleasures.

5. **How does the second herd of deer (the "forsakers") attempt to avoid the deer trapper, and why does this strategy ultimately fail?**

The second herd, the "forsakers," represents practitioners who try to avoid Mara by turning to extreme asceticism and renouncing all sensual pleasures. They retreat into the forest. However, this strategy fails because eventually, they become weak and emaciated, and are forced to return to the bait (sensual pleasures), where they become heedless once again and are caught.

6. **What is the approach of the third herd of deer (the "debaters"), and what is the flaw in their strategy?**

The third herd, the "debaters," represents practitioners who try to live near the bait (sensual pleasures) but attempt to be mindful and controlled in their consumption. They become entangled in speculative views and debates about metaphysical questions (e.g., whether the world is eternal or finite, whether the soul and body are the same). This entanglement with views creates openings for Mara to trap them, even though they believe they are being careful.

7. **How does the fourth herd of deer (the "escapers") ultimately achieve freedom from the deer trapper, and what does this represent in terms of spiritual practice?**

The fourth herd, the "escapers," represents practitioners who find a place where the deer trapper (Mara) cannot go. This symbolizes attaining meditative states such as the jhanas (states of deep concentration and absorption) and the formless attainments. By accessing these states of consciousness that are detached from sensuality, they escape Mara's grasp. It also highlights the importance of getting Right View, learning the Buddha's original Dharma, and paying proper attention.

8. **Why are the jhanas considered essential to escape Mara's grasp, according to the Nivapa Sutta?**

The jhanas are emphasized because they provide a pleasure and happiness (pīti and sukha) that is born of seclusion and is superior to sensual pleasures. This higher pleasure diminishes the allure of Mara's bait (sensual pleasures), making one less susceptible to temptation and negligence. By mastering the jhanas, practitioners can cultivate a state of mind that is beyond Mara's reach, effectively "blinding" him and becoming invisible to the evil one.

